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MISSIONARY EDUCATION IN AFRICA IN PERSPECTIVE: AGAINST THE THEORY OF BENEVOLENCE

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Abstract

There is disagreement between colonial and post-colonial Africanist historiographies on Africa over the role of missionaries in Africa especially their provision of education to the Africans prior and during colonisation. Precisely, controversy emanates from the possible motive behind missionary provision of education to the Africans. Colonial historiography, maintaining benevolence as the prime motive, a position unacceptable especially to post-colonial Africanist historians who argue that the motive and provision of education to the Africans can only be construed within the context of the 'womb' the missionaries came from. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to critically examine the motive behind missionary provision of education to the Africans in view of the two conflicting positions from the 'north' and the 'south' respectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of Africa needs to be rewritten partly as an ongoing struggle for genuine liberation and also to remove some of the distortions written about some of the key political actors on African historiography especially those from the 'north', as portrayed by historians from the 'north' [WALSH, 1947, VANSINA, 1965]. Distorting history, and creating myths and 'Great Lies' favourable to the 'north' and discrediting the 'south', especially the Africans, was a strategy the 'north' adopted to justify its conquest of Africa. By the 'north' or 'centre' is meant the colonisers of Africa be they English, Portuguese

, Germans, Italians, or the French, and by the 'south' or the 'periphery' is meant all the once-colonised nations of Africa, Latin America and Asia. To further illustrate the preceding position, Majeke [1986, 1896:1], noted:

But once let us take the initial step by asking how the situation in which we [the Africans] find ourselves has come about, prick the bubble of all the racial myths of white superiority and black inferiority and strip away layer after layer of the Great Lie, we are on the way to liberating ourselves.

This paper, however, attempts to provide an expose' on the distortions and 'lies' from the centre on the participation of missionaries, prior to, and during colonisation of Africa by the north. Specifically, the paper focuses on missionary provision of education to Africa prior to, and during colonisation. Of special interest to this paper are the possible motives and the fundamental principles underlying those motives. Their motives in introducing Western education, which was considered foreign to Africans, who after all, had their own education (Sifuna, 1990] become suspect especially in the light of

recent studies dealing with African reactions to various forms of European contact which have confirmed that missionaries, Africans as well as their European mentors disseminated education neither for its own sake nor to enable Africans to challenge colonial rule

[Berman, 1975:X].

In light of the preceding observations, Berman [1975] reiterated that the education missionaries provided for the Africans was not for its own sake and that it did not enable its recipients to challenge colonial rule. Berman further contended that such a practice was therefore irrelevant to Africans since such practices were intended to further the interests of the centre in Africa [Rodney, 1972; Ramose, 1986]. It is against this background that this paper proposes to carry out a critique of missionary provision of education in Africa prior to, and during colonisation. This examination is being made against the thesis that missionaries, through their introduction of Western education to Africans, were precursors in the subsequent colonisation of Africa. Also, this investigation is being made as a reaction against the 'benevolent theory' which urges that missionary activities in Africa and to Africans in particular, was "an unqualified blessing for the Africans" [Crowder, 1968:11]. In other words, this theory maintains that missionaries came to Africa for benevolent, philanthropic and humanitarian reasons [Majeke, 1986].

In reiterating the conceptions and treatise of Berman, one wonders as to whether the missionaries' restricting educational offerings to the rudiments which would enable native catechists to spread the gospel, providing for a very limited number of Africans to go to higher divinity studies, was benevolence at all. [Berman, 1975].

In a similar vein also, the view held by most historians from the periphery presupposes the purpose of missionary education it was not intended to train for independence but for subservience and dependence [Odinga, 1967; Rodney, 1972; Luthuli, 1982]. Indeed, this act cannot be construed either as philanthropy, humanitarianism or benevolence in any context [Majeke, 1986].

It is therefore against such observations that the missionary interest in providing education for Africans is being questioned especially for its apparent ambiguity and inconsistency with a view not only to correct the "whole fabric of falsifications and the "Great Lie", [Majeke, 1986:2] but to correct history for the benefit both of the coloniser and the colonised and thereby liberating both. Luthuli, Jones and Suret-Canale adumbrated that, in so much as education was used to subjugate Africa, so, it shall be used to liberate it [Luthuli, 1982; James, 1972; Suret-Canale, 1988]. Our contention in this paper, is that missionaries, through their provision of Western education to the indigenes of Africa were 'fronts' in the subsequent colonisation of the Africans.

The concept 'colonizer' revisited

Studies carried on colonisation agree and suggest that the key elements in the colonising process are the 'colonial,' the 'colonised' and the 'colonisers' [Sartre, 1964; Blandier, 1970; Busia, 1962; Memmi, 1990; Zahar, 1974; Rodney, 1972; Mark, 1984; Sifuna, 1990]. However, Memmi [1990] brings in two other dimensions to the analysis which are of interest to this paper. He admits that the colonizer can further be divided into two categories viz: the 'coloniser who accepts' and 'the coloniser who rejects'.

There is very little disagreement on the characterisations of the coloniser and the colonised and it is not in the interest of the present paper to go over the known concerning these two classes of people except to submit that,

the prosperity and privileges of the coloniser are directly based on the exploitation and pauperisation of the colonised [Memmi, 1990:18].

Following from the above, it can be maintained that an interdependent, dehumanising and exploitative relationship existed between the two classes of people, namely, the colonised and the colonizer. However, in as much as the two needed each other they also hated one another, precisely because they were both products of a system which thrives on the exploitation of man by man. Also it needs to be submitted that the bond between the coloniser and the colonised is both destructive and creative. It destroys and recreates the two partners in the colonisation process as the colonised and coloniser.

The former is disfigured into an oppressor, "an uncouth fragmented human being, a cheat, solely preoccupied with his privileges, the latter into a victim of oppression, dehumanized and broken in his development and accepting his own degradation" [Memmi, 1990:25]. What can be deduced from the brief analysis of the distinction between a coloniser and the colonised is fundamentally the nature of the relationship between the two which is an 'I - it', dehumanising and vertical relationship [Buber, 1958; Ozman, 1986], and therefore exploitative.

The third key element in the colonial situation is the 'colonial'. Memmi [1990:76] argues that, "a colonial is a European living in a colony but having no privileges, whose living conditions are not higher than those of a colonised person of equal economic and social status."

The colonial as portrayed above exists only ideally but not practically "because it is not up to the European in the colonized to remain a colonial even if he so intended" [Memmi, 1990:83]. In other words, it is not possible for one to be neutral or to be indifferent, one has to belong consciously or otherwise. From the above it can be deduced that a colonial only exists ideally, because in real terms, one has to align and hence cannot afford non-alignment. Either one is a coloniser or a colonized. Thus, being a coloniser or colonised could first, be a 'given' being based on one's skin or race. Thus, by virtue of being white and European one automatically was labelled a coloniser and enjoyed the privileges that went with it. Similarly, because one was black and African one became a colonised as well. Memmi [1990:26] supports this position by pointing out that,

What matters in the colony is not so much the individual's position in the process of production but rather his belonging to a race.

Fanon [1965:33] further corroborates this observation thus,

in the colonies the economic substructure is also the superstructure. The cause is the consequence: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you rich.

Secondly, and more importantly who came being a colonizer, could be deliberate like the bulk of those, including, missionaries, except for a few, who came from north Africa. Proceeding from the preceding discussion, it can be submitted that being a coloniser can be 'a given' as well as deliberate. It is 'a given' because one does not need to put any effort to be one. The moment a colonial benefits from the colonial system, he/she automatically becomes a coloniser because his benefits emanate from the exploitation of the colonised. It can also be deliberate and intentional like when a European living in a colony, takes it upon himself/herself to consolidate or perpetuate the interests of the centre or does not question why he/she has so many privileges whilst the majority of the indigenes survive in near poverty. Consequently, one cannot afford to sit on the fence or to be indifferent, either one is or one is not.

The purpose of the preceding discussion was an attempt to classify the missionaries in light of the three categories of people in the 'colonial situation'. It is imperative that we establish whether missionaries were colonials, colonisers or the colonized. Answers to the above, either in the negative or affirmative will affirm or negate the thesis of this paper and that will also facilitate evaluation of missionary involvement and interest in providing education for the Africans.

As to whether missionaries were the colonised or not, is highly contestable in view of our preceding analysis of the term. The answer is negative since firstly, the colonised were all Africans and secondly, there are no studies which show any of the missionaries being Africans. Therefore, missionaries, could not have been the colonised.

The question which remains now is whether missionaries were colonials [thus being neutral to the system] or they were colonisers. From the previous discussion on the terms colonial and coloniser, it was established that a colonial as defined above only exists ideallistically and if he/she does, he/she will be indiffernt to the system. However, there are no records which show them being neutral. If this position can be taken as cogent, then it means in real terms colonials were also colonisers, because they could not afford to be neutral and at the same time enjoying the privileges of the system. Therefore, all Europeans, and missionaries in particular, who came to Africa during or before its colonisation, were, indeed colonisers or agents of colonisation.

But because of the nuances of the term coloniser, there is need to analyse the term a bit further. Memmi [1990] further identified two types of colonisers viz - the 'coloniser who accepts' colonisation and the 'coloniser who rejects colonisation'. It must further be pointed out that both must make their positions very explicit. To reject, means either to withdraw physically from those conditions or remain to fight and change them. [Memmi 1990; Zahar, 1974]. Conversely, to accept, means to be committed to the colonising system not only in principle, but also in practice, consciously or otherwise. Again, it does not need to be over emphasized that there is no middle of the road approach. It is either one is or one is not.

With respect to the missionaries, prior discussions on this aspect has established that the missionaries were colonisers. However, what needs to be further established is whether they were 'colonisers who accepted' (hard colonisers) or 'colonisers who rejected'. From the preceding analysis of the concept coloniser and its two ramifications, one is persuaded to regard missionaries not only as colonials but also as 'colonisers who accepted' colonisation.

Suffice it to say that one might wish to introduce the notion of degrees of involvement in supporting the system thereby trying to absolve the missionaries' involvement. In other words, such categories as hard coloniser [those who accepted the system both in principle and in practice], and soft coloniser [those who supported the system only in principle] would be evoked. However, we must hasten to point out that, the concern of this paper is not with degrees of involvement, but just involvement per se and also that the notion of degrees of support is inconsequential in our context. Admittedly, this could be taken as an over-generalization because indeed not all missionaries were "colonizers who accepted" colonisation. They were, indeed, exceptions though very few, like the late Arthur G. Clutton-Broke (1897-1995) (Herald, 11th August 1995), Bishop Lamont, Fr. Traber and Mr Todd, who went out of their way, not only to fight against the colonial system, but more so, and being consistent with genuine Christian faith, to identify with the oppressed poor Africans, with a view to liberate them. Their desire to identify with, and to liberate the oppressed emanated from their faith which was rooted in liberation theology which in turn was rooted in philosophy of liberation which maintained that, "the practice of liberation must lead one to become poor with the poor" [Assman, 1975; 11]. Accordingly, these few genuine Christians in their attempt to be true to their calling could not afford to stand on the fence, or to be hypocritical, but rather opted to be counted with the oppressed and therefore took on a deliberate open

move to liberate the Africans. They contributed towards the liberation of the oppressed through amongst other means, education. Thus, whereas mainstream education meant for the Africans was intended to consolidate the interests of the centre, the education these few missionaries provided was education for liberation, intended to liberate the Africans from colonisation and its attended effects.

Consequent, upon the preceding, and because very few missionaries met the above criterion of identifying with the oppressed, it can therefore be argued that, on the whole, missionaries were indeed colonisers whose mission was consciously or unconsciously to facilitate the interests of the womb from where they came. [Majeke, 1986].

Emanating from the foregoing, it can therefore be argued that indeed missionaries were colonisers whose mission was to facilitate the interests of the womb from where they came. In other words, they were agents, though in a subtle manner of the system, and after all, is it not the case that, most of them came to Africa not only with the blessings, but more so with the sponsorship of their mother governments. This observation is supported by Majeke [1986:6], who contends that,

it is part of British strategy, with its varied resources, that the missionary finds his place. Looking at the picture as a whole, we see how the different agents of conquest contributed their share to the main task and how each one carried on where the other left off.

Majeke further proceeds to demonstrate the role of the missionary as an agent in making the aims of the centre realisable. Majeke, in the same vein suggested,

This history, therefore, must aim at unfolding a continuous process of a British strategy which made use of the missionary as an important agent to achieve its aims. While it is necessary to emphasize his part (the missionary's), it cannot be presented in isolation; he works always in conjunction with the other agencies, sometimes retiring into the background, sometimes even appearing to be in conflict with the Government, especially when he protests on behalf of the very people who are in the process of being subjugated, yet by so doing actually furthering the aims of the Government [Majeke, 1986:7] (*emphasis mine*).

That missionaries were agents of colonial rule is very clear from the above observations.

But what needs further emphasis is the fact that even though they were agents, they did not want to be openly associated with the interests of the centre. [Majeke, 1986; Mungazi, 1991] But then, that is only at the level of appearance and yet we are more concerned with reality i.e the reality which lay behind their provision of western education to the Africans. It is precisely our awareness of the apparent disharmony between appearance and reality that this paper in the following section proposes to make a brief at the objectives of missionary provision of education followed by a critique of it. Thus, it is anticipated that this paper will be able to establish how far reality was consistent with appearance and vice-versa. In other words, we would like to establish how far their motive and objectives were consistent with our thesis, as well their mission objective.

A brief at missionary education in Africa

That missionaries were pioneers in the provision of western education to the indigenes of Africa is incontestable [Atkinson, 1972; James, 1972; Sifuna, 1990; Mungazi, 1991; Brown and Hiskett, 1975]. What is debatable especially to Africanist historians of education and to the author in particular, are the assumptions, motives and objectives of the education they provided for Africans. Concern is raised over these issues in light of the dual character of the missionaries in their leading a life of appearance and reality. Because of their ambiguity one becomes also skeptical of their apparent sympathy and concern for the Africans. In other words was their sympathy and concern genuine or just an extension of their appearance?.

Studies on missionary provision of education to Africans agree that the main objectives of education was to Christianise and to bring "enlightenment" and "civilization" to the Dark Continent [Crowder, 1968; Ramose, 1986; Mungazi, 1991; Atkinson, 1972]. The assumption being that Africa had no education, religion and civilisation and hence a Dark Continent. They therefore took it upon themselves to provide these to the Africans and thereby bringing 'civilisation' and light to the Africans. Such moves by the missionaries have been misconstrued by others as benevolence, philanthropy humanitarianism but,

"the truth is that neither humanitarianism nor philanthropy nor benevolence had much to do with the case" [Majeke, 1986:2].

In other words, it could be argued that this so-called benevolent move was a strategy to camouflage real intentions - intentions which could be realised partly through giving the type of education the missionaries gave the Africans. It remains the intention of this

paper to attempt to unveil the real intentions behind missionary provision of education to Africans.

In the first instance, missionary interest in providing education to Africans was based on false premises that Africans had no education, religion and civilisation. This is the uninformed position held by scholars from the centre. They intentionally orchestrated this position in order to facilitate certain myths and theories about Africa and themselves relating to 'European Humanness' and 'african -humanness' [James, 1972; Majeke, 1986].

These myths resulted in the creation of a "sense of moral and racial superiority placing the white man at the top of the hierarchy and the black man at the bottom" [Crowder, 1968:5]. The collective thought - process on the sense of moral racial superiority led to other sub-assumptions.

These assumptions were false because indeed, the indigenous Africans had an education, religion and civilization [Sifuna, 1990; James, 1972; Busia, 1969; D'Aeth, 1975]. But because what the Africans had was different from theirs, therefore, they did not have any education, religion or civilisation and were thus considered to be uncivilized and belonged to the Dark Continent. Ramose [1986:110] sheds light on the so-called Darkness of Africa thus:

Africa was Dark, not so much because it was inhabited by dark people but because, in the view of its discoverers, the indigenous inhabitants of the continent were under cover of darkness in the sense that light of the so-called civilisation had not yet dawned on them. Accordingly, Africans needed civilization in order to be redeemed from their primitiveness and backwardness.

It is therefore against this backdrop that the missionaries took the 'benevolent' move upon themselves to provide Africans with some rudiments of education. The education could have been much better if it was meant to make the Africans **be like them**. Rather, it was intended to maintain the gap between the two races thereby facilitating not only the interests of the missionaries but of the 'centre' and the system as well, but at the same time dehumanising and exploiting the African to preserve the superior-inferior dichotomy (Ramose, 1986).

The education the missionaries provided could not have been different because it was greatly influenced, as discussed above, by 'lies' and distortions from the centre concerning their superiority and the African inferiority. These myths and theories apart from influencing education, also influenced the nature of interaction and relationships between Africans and the missionaries. Kapenzi [1982:2] sheds light on the nature of the relationship when he says,

The vast majority of the missionaries referred to Africans as the degraded descendants of Ham and as Kaffer natives. Therefore missionaries did not practice Biblical Christianity - but colonial religion in which African - missionaries' relations were set in the pattern of masters and servants, superiors and inferiors.

This master - servant, 'I - it' relationship mentioned above, spilt into the education the missionaries provided for the natives [Buber, 1958]. The education had to reinforce this 'I - it,' master - servant, superior - inferior, vertical relationship between the missionaries and the natives. It is precisely against this background, that the missionaries probably chose to give rudimentary education to the natives [Berman, 1975]. Mumbengegwi [1989:50] sheds light on the rudimentary education when he quotes the following from missionary documents:

It is a mistake to aim at too high a literary education for the Africans. We desire only to aid the officials of Anglo-Saxon governments to control with authority the Native and bid him attain a place of usefulness as a servant. He, an African is not equal to us and we cannot make him. We should not teach or allow an African to think that he is as good as a white man. You should be fooling him if you did that.

He further highlights this rudimentary aspect in the following summary of missionary interests in educating the Africans, viz:-

- providing basic literary skills to Africans to make them read the scriptures.
- inculcation of simple manual skills to make Africans useful servants
- teaching the African that he is racially inferior to the European and that he should occupy second place in society [Mumbengegwi, 1989:51].

What can be deduced from the analysis of missionary education for the Africans is that the education was racist, exploitative and irrelevant for the Africans, especially exploitative because the interests of the African were completely disregarded. It was designed to facilitate the development of the interests of the 'centre' in Africa. If these observations are sound, then the benevolent theory from the north needs revisiting as it relates to missionary provision of education to the Africans.

Towards a critique of missionary provision of education in Africa

Any history is written from a point of view and even its interpretation is also done from a certain perspective [Walsh, 1965; Galbraith, 1964]. Therefore in order to understand a particular historical document it is necessary to understand the context not only of the events but more so of the historian reconstructing and interpreting the events [McCall, 1964; Walsh, 1947]. And as such no historian can claim to have completely recaptured a past event hence the need for history to be continually rewritten in the light of new theories. It is therefore in light of the limitations of any historiography that a critique of the provision of education to Africa by missionaries is being advanced in the light of previous theories on the subject.

Missionary provision of education, to Africa, like colonisation has been given varied and even conflicting interpretations. The interpretations varied depending on whether the interpreters of the event were from the 'centre' or the 'periphery'. It must however be pointed that the interpretations were in most cases opposed to each other. Those from the 'centre' proposed the 'benevolent theory' to explain the event. This theory urges that missionary provision of education to Africa was done in good faith - to extricate them out of their backwardness by giving them light in the form of western education and civilization. In other words they argue that missionary provision of education to Africa "was an unqualified blessing for the Africans" [Crowder, 1968:11].

This is the position Africanist historians from the so-called 'periphery' are challenging. Their position is that neither philanthropy, benevolence nor humanitarianism had much to do with the case i.e their providing Africans with western education and civilization [Majeke, 1990; Mungazi, 1991; James, 1972, Berman, 1975]. In fact this is the position the author of this paper holds. In the light of our previous discussion on 'appearance and reality' as relating to the missionaries' activities in Africa, the author's position is that, on the surface, it might have been benevolence, but underneath, in reality, exploitation as they were agents of capitalist penetration and colonisation. In other

words this paper argues that missionaries in providing Africans with western education, culture and civilization, were in fact, paving way for colonisation and capitalism to find roots in Africa. Missionaries were therefore agents of colonization and capitalism to find roots in Africa. Missionaries were therefore agents of colonisation and capitalism in Africa. This position is quite unacceptable especially to the north but in order to understand it,

it is important to understand the womb from which sprang the missionary movement in Southern Africa and indeed in all the colonies of the British Empire... To understand its function (missionaries') we must view it as part of a great historical movement, the expansion of capitalism [Majeke, 1986:1] (emphasis mine)

Following up from the preceding, missionary provision of education in Africa can fully be comprehended within the larger context of capitalist penetration and expansion to foreign lands. Meaning that since some of the missionaries were British citizens, and some even being sponsored by British governments, their activities of evangelising and educating the natives (Africans) only make sense if they are seen to be consistent with the interests and expectation of their 'wombs' back home i.e their home governments. Hence, their activities should be seen as preparing the necessary environment for colonisation and capitalism to take root.

Also, the previous discussion earlier on, examined the distinction between colonial, colonised and further between 'colonizer who accepted' and 'colonizer who rejected' led us to the conclusion that missionaries were indeed colonisers. As a sequel to this they had to reflect and be consistent with the interest of the colonial and capitalist 'womb' they came from [Memmi, 1990].

Thus, missionaries were colonisers like any other coloniser who promoted the interests of the centre and the system by exploiting the Africans. That they were, can be deduced among other things from their attitude towards and their interaction with the Africans they purported to have come to rescue and also in the type of education they designed for the African.

Rodney [1972:264] argues that missionary education was exploitative and irrelevant when he says

it was not an educational system that grew out of the African environment or one that was designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources.

Because it "did not grow out of the African environment" but was imported and imposed on the African, it indeed had little to do with the African existential conditions and was therefore irrelevant. Because it had relevance only to the missionaries as it made Africans into better 'use - objects' of the missionaries it was therefore exploitative. Exploitative, precisely because missionaries took Africans not as ends in themselves but means to their (missionaries) own ends [Raphael, 1981]. Also irrelevant because it was not guided by a philosophy of life and a philosophy of education which reflected and articulated the genuine existential conditions of the Africans, because it is our contention that, for any education to be genuine and relevant it should emanate from a people's philosophy of life and philosophy of education [Luthuli, 1982].

Berman (1975:XII) also supports our position when he submits that,

Missionaries wanted to restrict educational offerings (to Africans) to the rudiments which would enable native catechists to spread the gospel providing for a very limited number to go on to higher divinity studies.

But then the question which remains to be answered is, if the missionaries were the benevolent and humanitarian people they claim and were made to be, why give the Africans rudimentary and irrelevant education. Why not give them genuine liberative education? Was that not being inconsistent with their mission goals at the onset? Of course, they could not have given them genuine relevant and liberative education because that would be acting contrary to 'themselves' and the 'womb' which was fully aware that that type of education would have resulted in the long run in creating a liberative and revolutionary consciousness in the African, a move which could have been counterproductive to the system the missionaries were agents of and serving.

Thus, it can be argued that missionaries in providing diluted and rudimentary education to native Africans, were not only preparing and furthering the interests of capital but were also undermining their credibility in the minds of the people they claim to have

come to liberate. With time, Africans realised how they were being exploited and were no less averse to using the missionaries for their own purposes than were the missionaries for theirs [Berman, 1975:XI].

The preceding discussion, it is hoped, has convincingly discussed and established the position of missionaries and their education in the colonisation of Africa, that indeed they were colonisers. If they were not they should have demonstrated it openly by rejecting the system. However it must be submitted that not all of them were colonizers who accepted, others, like the late Arthur Guy Clutton-Broke (1897-1995) (Herald, April 11, 1995) and Bishop Lamont stood apart from the crowd, dissociated themselves from the colonizers, identified with the colonized and fought the system with the colonized against the oppressive and exploitative system.

Conclusion

This paper, it is hoped has demonstrated quite effectively that, if the role of missionaries in Africa, especially their provision of education to Africa is to make sense, then it should only be interpreted and understood within the larger context of capitalist penetration into foreign lands. In other words, missionaries should be seen as precursors to subsequent colonisation and exploitation of Africa through education. Theories from the north about the north, and about the south, also need to be understood in their proper historical contexts as theories intended to justify the north's control of the south. And just as education was used as a tool to conquer, colonise and exploit Africa, this paper strongly contends that, education should equally be used to liberate the periphery, especially Africa [Crowder, 1968]; Luthuli, 1982; James, 1972; Camoy, 1974; Majeke, 1986]; Suret-Canale, 1988].

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